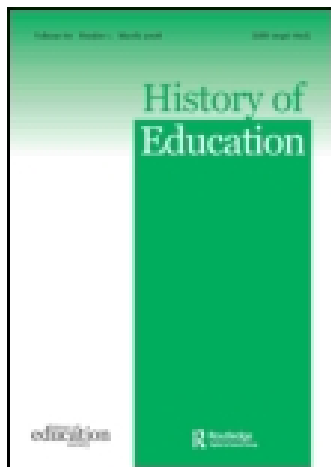


This article was downloaded by: [McMaster University]

On: 23 October 2014, At: 06:06

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

### The taming of disability: phrenology and bio-power on the road to the destruction of otherness in France (1800-60)

Pieter Verstraete

<sup>a</sup> Catholic University Leuven, and Center for Disability , Special Needs Education and Child Care , Vesaliusstraat 2, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium E-mail:

Published online: 20 Feb 2007.

To cite this article: Pieter Verstraete (2005) The taming of disability: phrenology and bio-power on the road to the destruction of otherness in France (1800-60), History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society, 34:2, 119-134, DOI: [10.1080/0046760042000338746](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760042000338746)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760042000338746>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &



## The taming of disability: phrenology and bio-power on the road to the destruction of otherness in France (1800–60)

PIETER VERSTRAETE

Catholic University Leuven, and Center for Disability, Special Needs Education  
and Child Care, Vesaliusstraat 2, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium.  
E-mail: Pieter.Verstraete@ped.kuleuven.ac.be

We arrested him on purpose, to inform him he was free.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In the second half of the eighteenth century both deafness and blindness became philosophical problems.<sup>2</sup> Intellectuals, stimulated by the sensualist theories of Etienne-Bonnot de Condillac (1714–80) and John Locke (1632–1704), tried to understand how a sensorially disabled person was able to reason and develop ideas, for the senses were thought to be the basis of reasoning.<sup>3</sup> Together with medical developments and religious motives, texts like Diderot's *Lettres sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (*Letters on the blind for the use of those who see*) (1749) and *Lettre sur les sourds et muets, à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent* (*Letter on the deaf and dumb for the use of those who hear and speak*) (1752)<sup>4</sup> increased interest in the vicissitudes of deaf and blind people and led towards the foundation of special institutions at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Through the work and publications of people such as Abbé de l'Epée (1712–89), Samuel Heinicke (1727–90) and Valentin Haüy (1745–1822) the educability of deaf and blind people was disseminated throughout Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> Only later did mentally retarded people become the object of a scientific and educational gaze.<sup>7</sup> Until the end of the first half of the nineteenth century they were looked after by family or neighbours and often contributed in one way or another to the economic life of the local village. At the same time, they were also sometimes the target of rejection

1 [Exprès nous l'avons arrêté, Pour l'informer qu'il était libre] Extract from a Vaudeville based on the life of the Wild Boy of Aveyron and played around 1800. Quoted in T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron. Dernier enfant sauvage, premier enfant fou* (Paris: Pluriel, 1993), 133.

2 J. Branson and D. Miller, *Damned for their Difference. The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled. A Sociological History* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 66–90; F. Dreves, 'Leider zum grössten Theile Bettler geworden...' *Organisierte Blindenfürsorge in Preussen zwischen Aufklärung und Industrialisierung (1806–1860)* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach-Verlag, 1998), 80–90.

3 For more information about the role of sensualism especially related to the educability of blind people see: U. Hofer, 'Sensualismus als Grundlage erster sonderpädagogischer Unterrichtsversuche. Seine Bedeutung für die Frage nach der Bildbarkeit blinder Menschen', *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 46 (2000), 193–214.

4 These texts were originally published as *Lettres sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* and *Lettre sur les sourds et muets, à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent*.

5 In 1760 and 1778 two institutions for the deaf emerged respectively in Paris and Leipzig. In 1784 and 1806 two institutions were founded for the blind respectively in Paris and Berlin.

6 See for example M. Bézagu-Deluy, *L'abbé de l'Epée: instituteur gratuit des sourds-muets* (Paris: Seghers, 1990); F. Dreves, 'Leider zum grössten Theile Bettler geworden...'.

7 I. Weijers, 'Educational initiatives in mental retardation in nineteenth-century Holland', *History of Education Quarterly*, 40 (2000), 460–76.

and insensitive attitudes.<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther (1483–1546), for example, considered these *Wechselbälge* children—as he called them—as little devils lacking every spark of intelligence and advised that they should be got rid of by drowning.<sup>9</sup>

Because there were no accurate diagnostic instruments, some of these children slipped through the selection criteria used by institutions for deaf people, leading to pedagogical difficulties for the instructors. In line with the rules of most institutions they were expelled after a few fruitless years, for there was no belief in their educability. In the first half of the nineteenth century, gradually internal differentiation took place—at least in France and Germany.<sup>10</sup> In March 1842 Karl Wilhelm Saegert (1809–79), director of the Royal Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Berlin, diagnosed a young boy named Hermann Taube as deaf and dumb. Very soon Saegert changed his opinion but rather than casting the child off he tried to make him capable of being educated. This led to the foundation in 1845 of the Institute for the Care and Education of the Mentally Handicapped in Berlin and the publication of the book *Versuche mit der Heilung des Blödsinns auf intellectuellem Wege* (*Attempted Healing of Feeble-mindedness in an Intellectual Way*).<sup>11</sup> In France a Wild Boy captured at the end of the eighteenth century was brought to the national institution for the deaf in Paris in the summer of 1800. At that point, the national institution was under the leadership of Abbé Sicard. The Wild Boy was educated for approximately five years by the physician of that institution, Jean-Marc Itard. Although Itard's educational experiment can be seen as a starting point for the institutionalized care of mentally retarded children, it can be argued that the real breakthrough in the French notion of *éducabilité*—synonym for the German word *Bildungsfähigkeit* and the English educability (a person is 'educable' to the extent by which he/she can be educated)—came with the rise of phrenology in Paris between 1800 and 1860.

Rosen, Jak and Scheerenberger have pointed to what Scheerenberger has called 'the far-reaching effect of phrenology on the diagnosis and treatment of mental retardation' in Europe and the USA.<sup>12</sup> Samuel Gridley Howe, who founded the Massachusetts School for Idiots and Feeble-minded Youth in south Boston in 1855, was heavily influenced by phrenological theory.<sup>13</sup> This article will develop Scheerenberger's statement in respect of the French situation in the first half of the nineteenth century to argue that the shift from sensualism to phrenology made it possible, paradoxically, to see the mentally retarded as perfectible and thus educable. With the decline of phrenology, however, the belief in educability also seemed to disappear. The investigations of Pélicier and Thuillier revealed that around 1860 only 350 idiots and imbeciles were educated in the Parisian

8 See for example P. Perron, 'L'évolution des idées à propos des déficiences mentales', *Les science de l'éducation*, 4 (1989), 7–28.

9 See for example W. Bachmann, *Das unselige Erbe des Christentums: Die Wechselbälge* (Giessen: Institut für Heil- und Sonderpädagogik Giessen, 1985).

10 U. Keller, "'Bildungsfähigkeit" von Kindern mit geistiger Behinderung. Theoretischer Kontext und Muster der Praxis in den Berlinischen Anfängen der pädagogischen Arbeit mit "Blödsinnigen"', *Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung*, 6 (2000), 51–2.

11 C. Bradl, *Anfänge der Anstaltsfürsorge für Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung ('Idiotenanstaltswesen'). Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Ideengeschichte des Behindertenbetreuungswesens am Beispiel des Rheinlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Afra-Verlag, 1990), 227 and U. Keller, "'Bildungsfähigkeit" von Kindern mit geistiger Behinderung'.

12 R.C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation* (Baltimore: Brookes, 1983), 53; T. Jak, *Armen van geest. Hoofdstukken uit de geschiedenis van de Nederlandse zwakzinnigenzorg* (Amsterdam: Jacob van campen, 1988); M. Rosen, G.R. Clark and M.S. Kivitz (eds), *The History of Mental Retardation: Collected Papers*, Vol. I (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1976).

13 L.E. Richard, *Samuel Gridley Howe* (Boston: Dana Estes and Company, 1935).

psychiatric hospitals. Furthermore, attempts at education outside these institutions were negligible.<sup>14</sup> According to a survey by the inspectors-general of charitable institutions conducted in 1876, this was less than 1% of the total number of idiots and imbeciles (approximately 40,000).<sup>15</sup> Désiré Magloire Bourneville (1840–1909) stressed the atrocities and aggressions perpetrated on idiots and imbeciles and urged greater hospitalization of these so-called abnormal and dangerous creatures.<sup>16</sup>

Using primary and secondary sources the role of phrenology will be outlined in this article by examining the life and works of three prominent French phrenologists: Jacques-Etienne Belhomme, Félix Voisin and Louis Delasiauve.<sup>17</sup> Although the ‘data’ for this article will be provided by historical analysis, the ‘method’ will be of a more philosophical kind: a dialectical one.

### Cross-fertilization between Michel Foucault and William Shakespeare

In outlining the historical development of the French care for mentally retarded people in the first half of the nineteenth century (the so-called idiots and imbeciles), three overlapping episodes will be distinguished in a process that will be called *the taming of disability*. This refers to Shakespeare’s play *The Taming of the Shrew* and to the title of a book published by Ian Hacking in 1990 in which he describes how the Western world gave birth to the belief in statistical laws underlying human behaviour.<sup>18</sup> It will be argued in this article that mentally retarded persons were represented more or less successively as savage or uncivilized, incurable or sick and abnormal or deviant. The question has been raised in a recently published article as to why historians need another ‘Other’; and one can easily doubt whether this word is being used correctly.<sup>19</sup> Is it not possible that from 1800 onwards (to use an artificial starting-point), in order to wipe out their frightening essence and dissident character, disabled persons were not constructed as ‘Other’ but deconstructed and linked through a variety of stages with the normal?—a term, according to George Canguilhem, that appeared for the first time in France in 1759.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the ‘Other’ has been continuously colonized by an autonomous, modern and enlightened self, be it physicians, teachers, parents or social scientists. Even for the disabled self there seemed to be a stress on the importance of observation, classification, scientifically structured norms and the strengthening of the individual and collective life. The recent introduction of a new technique in respect of the mentally retarded by the Belgian government can serve here as an example. The mentally retarded were encouraged to be responsible

14 Y. Pélacier and G. Thuillier, ‘Pour une histoire de l’éducation des enfants idiots en France (1830–1914)’, *Revue historique*, 103 (1979), 99–130.

15 D.M. Bourneville, *Recueil de mémoires, notes et observations sur l’idiotie* (Paris: Typographique des enfants, 1891), IX.

16 Bourneville was the most important reformer of French special education for mentally retarded children and adults at the end of the nineteenth century. See for example J. Gateaux-Mennecier and J. Mises, *Bourneville et l’enfance aliénée: l’humanisation du déficient mental au XIX siècle* (Paris: Centurion, 1989).

17 This article is an elaboration of P. Verstraete, *Macht en onmacht in het orthopedagogisch werkveld. Foucault en de zorg voor personen met een mentale handicap in de 19e eeuw* (Leuven: Acco, 2004). The author owes much to Prof. Dr. Jan Masschelein and Prof. Dr. Walter Hellinckx for their critical and stimulating remarks.

18 I. Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); see, for a philosophical discussion about the use of the construction-paradigm, I. Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

19 C. Kudlick, ‘Review essay: Disability history. Why we need another “other”’, *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 763–93.

20 G. Canguilhem, *On the Normal and the Pathological* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), 151.

for their own care by being given a sum of money to spend as they wished, taking into account their own personal needs.<sup>21</sup>

From this point of view it is possible to see a handicap as a crystallization of what Michel Foucault (1926–84) has described as bio-power.<sup>22</sup> ‘After the anatomo-politics of the human body, set in motion in the course of the eighteenth century, at the end of the same century, something is seen to appear which is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but something that I should like to call a “biopolitics” of the human kind.’<sup>23</sup> Foucault understood this notion as a kind of rationalization of political government. Life itself, considered as a biological entity, became a political object that had great impact on the strength of a nation. Not only the sum of individual bodies but also the biological characteristics of a population—mortality, birth, age and sexuality—were keys to the political government establishing a productive and wealthy state. But Foucault did not mean that the disciplinary strategies like observation, registration and classification were substituted for regulative strategies.<sup>24</sup> They remained active but were coupled with regulative strategies aimed at perfecting the collective life.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault devoted some of his lectures at the College of France to the care for idiotic and imbecile children—including the local idiot Charles Joux.<sup>26</sup> Charles was in his forties and served as a quiet, underpaid workman. He had a special relationship with a little girl named Sophie Adam. From time to time Sophie masturbated the grown-up idiot. Citing the reaction of a contemporary villager, Foucault argued that this behaviour was accepted by the local population.<sup>27</sup> But when through a random inspection of the girl’s underwear in 1867 the parents discovered what was going on, both the parents and the mayor requested a psychiatric investigation. Suddenly Charles Joux became a psychiatric patient and a danger to the population. Important to Foucault was this switch in attitude towards idiotic and imbecile children—a switch that could be explained by the emergence of an independent, global and invisible new form of power: bio-power. Life itself, instead of death, the standard instead of the law, and scientific arguments instead of sovereign attributes, became related to the power.<sup>28</sup> What mattered was no longer the well-being of

21 B. Maes, ‘Zorg en ondersteuning op maat voor kinderen en jongeren met een handicap’, in F. De Fever, W. Hellinckx and H. Grietens (eds), *Handboek jeugdhulpverlening. Een orthopedagogisch perspectief*, (Leuven: Acco, 2003), 413–14.

22 For a historical discussion of the content of his work see: A. Still and I. Velody (eds), *Rewriting the History of Madness. Studies in Foucault’s Histoire de la Folie* (London: Routledge, 1992); G. Gutting, ‘Michel Foucault’s Phänomenologie des Krankegeistes’, in M. S. Micale and R. Porter (eds), *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 331–47.

23 [Après l’anatomo-politique du corps humain, mise en place au cours du XVIIIe siècle, on voit apparaître à la fin de ce même siècle, quelque chose qui n’est plus une anatomo-politique du corps humain, mais que j’appellerais une ‘biopolitique’ de l’espèce humaine] M. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1976* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 216.

24 M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

25 For more information about bio-power see: H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault. Beyond Hermeneutics and Structuralism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 126–42; M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: la volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 177–211; M. Foucault, ‘La naissance de la médecine sociale’, in *Dits et Ecrits II, 1976–1988*, by M. Foucault, D. Defert and F. Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 210–28; M. Foucault, ‘Naissance de la biopolitique’, in *Dits et Ecrits II, 1976–1988*, by M. Foucault, D. Defert and F. Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 818–25; M. Foucault, ‘Les mailles du pouvoir’, in *Dits et Ecrits II, 1976–1988*, by M. Foucault, D. Defert and F. Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1012–13; M. Foucault, *Il faut défendre*, 213–35.

26 M. Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique. Cours au collège de France 1973–1974* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 198–231; M. Foucault, *Les anormaux. Cours au collège de France 1974–1975* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

27 ‘Elles racontent en riant qu’elles ont fait du lait caillé, et l’adulte répond tout simplement: “oh vous êtes ‘deux petites rosses’”!’: M. Foucault, *Les anormaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

28 See M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir*, last chapter: ‘Droit de mort et pouvoir sur la vie’.



one person (*Il Principe*) but the welfare of the state, conceived as a population with biological characteristics (birth, strength, disease and so on). In his books, articles and interviews Foucault tended to regard the social sciences as a result and a possibility of this new form of power. Scientific knowledge regarding the population became indispensable in order to discipline the individual body and to regulate the population.

So a second question—although subordinate to the one mentioned above—is whether one can find some features of this new power/knowledge nexus in the phrenological discourses of Voisin, Belhomme and Delasiauve. In the first section, Itard's educational experiment will be revisited and presented as an ambivalent turning point between a savage and a civilized representation of the handicapped that introduced the importance of observation. In a second section, a kind of antithesis will be described by examining the works of Pinel and Esquirol. Both stimulated a medical approach to the handicapped. They became sick and incurable persons who had to be classified according to a medical nosology. The third section will take a closer look at the role of phrenology and will stress the consequences of the synthesis of ideas contained in phrenology for the representation of the handicapped. Both classification and observation became linked with the importance of improving the life of an abnormal and dangerous individual.

### **Thesis: great expectations or complete civilization**

More than four decades before Charles Dickens (1812–70) visited the Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind on his American tour and met Laura Bridgman (1829–89), one of the first deaf-blind people to learn language,<sup>29</sup> a little boy of about 12 years old was captured in the South of France.<sup>30</sup> This small child, also known as the Wild Boy of Aveyron, became famous around the turn of the eighteenth century through the work of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1774–1838). Itard was born on 24 April 1774 in Oraison, a little village in Provence, where his parents had a country house. He was predestined to succeed his father as a negotiator but the revolution changed his destiny and Itard became a third-class surgeon at the military hospital of Val-de-Grâce in May 1798. One year earlier, in 1797, the Wild Boy was noticed for the first time by some peasants from Lacaune, where he lived in the forests. After several days they succeeded in capturing him while he was gathering acorns and chestnuts but very soon he escaped and was not seen again until three hunters captured him for the second time in the summer of 1799. The Wild Boy was brought to a woman in Lacaune who taught him to fry potatoes in the fire. Her mistreatment of him, however, caused him to run away again. This time he did not find his way back to the forests where he had lived for approximately six years, but wandered during the terrible, raw winter of 1799–1800 in desolate mountain country. At the dawn of the nineteenth century a man named Vidal noticed the Wild Boy near his house and informed Constans Saint-Estève, the local government official, of his whereabouts. At this point, as Harlan Lane puts it, the boy stepped across the threshold into a new life.<sup>31</sup> The Wild Boy

29 C. Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842); A. van Drenth, "'Tender sympathy and scrupulous Fidelity'", gender and professionalism in the history of deaf education in the United States', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 50 (2003), 367–83.

30 For biographical information about Itard and the Wild Boy of Aveyron see: T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*; H. Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); L. Malson, *Les enfants sauvages. Mythe et réalité suivi de mémoire et rapport sur Victor de l'Aveyron* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 2002); R.C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation*, 74–8; I. Mans, *Zin der zothheid: vijf eeuwen cultuurgeschiedenis van zotten, onnozelen en zwakzinnigen* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2004).

31 H. Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (London: Random House, 1984), 122.

was placed in the Hospice Civil de Saint-Affrique (Civil Hospice of Saint Affrique) in the south of France. There, he swapped his freedom for the more or less continuous gaze of science and humanity. Observation became an indispensable part of his existence. The first document Thierry Gineste reported in his historical overview of Victor can serve here as proof. In a letter dated 10 January 1800 Saint-Estève asked the board of the hospital to prevent the boy from running away as a matter of urgency: 'Have him guarded over particularly during the day and get him to sleep at night in a room from which there is no risk of his escaping.'<sup>32</sup>

The boy stayed in the hospital for 26 days before he was transferred to Rodez, the capital of the department of Aveyron. Here he was subjected to the first attempts at registration. The first reports on his physical, intellectual and moral condition, written by two botanists—Jean-Pierre Bonnaterre (1751–1804) and Mouton-Fontenille (1769–1837)—both appeared in 1800.<sup>33</sup> Bonnaterre's report was the most extensive. After outlining the existing histories of savage people collected by the famous naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), he added a description of the Wild Boy of Aveyron to this enumeration. With this picture Bonnaterre tried to put an end to the gossip and uncertainty about the savage's nature. Some individuals who had met the boy said that he was a normal child. Others stressed his strange appearance and stated that he could swim like a fish and climb like a squirrel. As a result, they saw him as an extraordinary creature totally different from normal people. Still others believed the boy was deaf and dumb, because he did not utter the slightest sound or use any signs.<sup>34</sup> For Bonnaterre the Wild Boy of Aveyron clearly had more in common with animals than with human people, for he hid his food, did not wear any clothes or shoes, and slept on the floor.

Besides his feral character, Bonnaterre had some suspicions about the imbecilic nature of the child and feared that this could interfere with his instruction. The boy seemed to have no memory or spirit, did not have any ideas that he could compare and his gaze lacked any steadfastness. It is important to see that this report is simply a description of the Wild Boy's situation. On the one hand, scientific curiosity classified the Wild Boy as a variety of the human species. On the other hand, he remained strongly linked with the savage animals. One could say that he was immobilized like a rare butterfly and pinned down in a detailed taxonomy of nature. The only alteration Bonnaterre observed in Victor's condition was a strengthening of his body. Moreover, he warned against a sudden modification of the Wild Boy's life because the histories of other savage people had proved to have negative outcomes. After describing the boy's momentous situation, Bonnaterre ended his report with a sentence that would be determinant for the education of the Wild Boy in particular and for the instruction of idiotic children in general: 'This succession of facts and observations will, perhaps, appear simple and minute, but general and brilliant surveys can only provide vague and imperfect knowledge; small details, however, provide exact and precise ideas.'<sup>35</sup> From this moment on, as was the case in Bonnaterre's report, the life of the Wild Boy would be observed in detail, analysed in

32 [Faites le particulièrement surveiller le jour, et coucher la nuit dans une chambre don't il ne puisse s'évader.] Reproduced in T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*, 113.

33 Mouton-Fontenille, 'Notice sur le sauvage du Dt. De l'Aveiron', in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 212–15; J.B. Bonnaterre, 'Notice historique sur le sauvage de l'Aveyron et sur quelques autres individus qu'on a trouvé dans les forêts, à différentes époques', in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 180–212.

34 J.B. Bonnaterre, 'Notice historique sur le sauvage de l'Aveyron', 182–3.

35 [Cette série de faits et d'observations paraîtra, peut-être, simple et minutieuse; mais des aperçus vastes et brillants ne peuvent donner que des connaissances vague et imparfaites; les petits détails au contraire, fournissent des idées exactes et précises.] J.B. Bonnaterre, 'Notice historique sur le sauvage de l'Aveyron', 208.



depth and, more importantly, compared with his former situation to detect any improvement in his behaviour, any civilizing of his affections, or any alteration in his intellectual functions. In *Surveiller et Punir (Discipline and Punish)* Michel Foucault argued that it was precisely this detailed and meticulous attention that paved the way for a range of political techniques, methods and knowledge that gave birth to modern man.<sup>36</sup>

In a letter dated 23 June 1800 Minister of the Interior Lucien Bonaparte (1775–1840) asked the prefect of the Aveyron department why his orders to transfer the Wild Boy to Paris had not yet been obeyed.<sup>37</sup> The same day he wrote a letter to abbé Roche-Ambroise Sicard (1742–1822),<sup>38</sup> at that time director of the National Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Paris, to inform him of the imminent arrival of the Wild Boy of Aveyron at his institution.<sup>39</sup> Bonnaterre would accompany the Wild Boy during his two-week transfer to Paris. This was not a mere geographical voyage. In Paris the Wild Boy would be entrusted to the care of a new science: medical science. From December 1800 onwards a physician was officially connected to the National Deaf and Dumb Institution.<sup>40</sup> Jean-Marc Itard—a first-class surgeon at the time—was the first to occupy this position. He was appointed by Sicard in part to educate the Wild Boy of Aveyron with the help of a governess, Madame Guérin. Both Itard and Sicard were members of the short-lived society called the Society of the Observers of Man.<sup>41</sup> This society was founded at the end of the eighteenth century by intellectuals of various kinds. Until 1804, doctors, linguists, historians, naturalists, writers and voyagers came together, inspired by the Socratic advice ‘Know yourself’. They tried to answer the question Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) had asked himself in his treatise on the origin of inequality among man: How can one obtain knowledge about the natural state of humankind?<sup>42</sup>

The rumours that preceded the arrival of the Wild Boy of Aveyron in Paris and the publication of novels based on his history, such as that by Ducray-Duminil,<sup>43</sup> informed the members of the society of the existence of a boy who had been living in the woods isolated from society from the age of five onwards. Louis-François Jauffret (1770–1850), secretary of the society, wrote almost immediately to the administrators of the Civil Hospice of Saint Affrique, presuming that the Wild Boy was still staying there:

If it be true that you have at your hospice a young, wild twelve-year-old who was found in the woods, it would be vital for the process of human knowledge that a zealous and trustworthy observer get hold of him, delay his civilization for a considerable space of time, make up an outline of the ideas he has acquired, study the way in which he expresses these and conclude whether the condition of a human left to his own devices is completely contrary to intelligence.<sup>44</sup>

36 M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir*.

37 Reproduced in T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*, 136.

38 Abbé Roche-Ambroise-Cucurron Sicard succeeded Abbé de l'Épée as head of the National Institution for Deaf and Dumb in Paris. He led the Institution from 1791 until his death in 1822 and substituted the natural signs for methodological ones. See for example H. Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 30–41.

39 Reproduced in T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*, 137.

40 T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*, 64.

41 For more information about this society see J.-L. Chappey, *La société des observateurs de l'homme: personnel et activités d'une société savante sous le consulat* (Paris, 1999); J. Copans and J. Jamin, *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française* (Paris: Le sycomore, 1978).

42 J.J. Rousseau, *Vertoog over de ongelijkheid* (Meppel: Boom, 1983), 43 and further.

43 F.G. Ducray-Duminil, *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt* (Paris: Le prieur, 1779).

44 [S'il est vrai que vous ayez maintenant dans votre hospice un jeune sauvage de douze ans trouvé dans les bois, il serait bien important pour les progrès des connaissances humaines qu'un observateur plein de zèle et de bonne foi pût, en s'emparant de lui, en retardant de quelque temps sa civilisation, constater la somme de ses idées acquises, étudier la manière dont il les exprime et voir si la condition de l'homme abandonné à lui-même est tout à fait contraire au développement de l'intelligence.] Reproduced in T. Gineste, *Victor de l'Aveyron*, 129.

It seemed that the study of the Wild Boy of Aveyron could reveal the development of humankind and so open up a way to determine which features were due to nature and which to culture. Instead of making expensive voyages of discovery, it became possible to study the origins of mankind by observing one's own savages. At the same time that Nicholas Baudin (1754–1803) was sailing to Australia to study the aborigines, using the anthropological handbook of Degérando,<sup>45</sup> *Considération sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages* (*Consideration of the different ways in which to approach the observation of savage peoples*), Itard began his educational experiment. First of all he outlined the actual situation of the Wild Boy in his report of 1801 in order to provide an objective basis to demonstrate his actual improvement.<sup>46</sup> This accent on improvement and development was a new perspective and was added to the importance of observation in the interaction with so-called savage or uncivilized people. According to Itard, his educational experiment would lead to the complete civilization of the Wild Boy. In other words, Itard held out great expectations for the Wild Boy's normalization.

Indeed, in his first report Itard was convinced that Victor, as he called the boy, was an uncivilized person due to the fact that he had not had any contact with society from the age of five onwards. Founding his methods on the sensualist views of, for example, John Locke and Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Itard tried to civilize his pupil.<sup>47</sup> This civilization would not only be a way to normalize the pupil himself but would trace the development of European civilization from the beginning of history. But optimistic though the tone of his first report was, the tone of his second report—based on five years of daily observations—sounded disappointed.<sup>48</sup> Although Victor's intellectual, sensual and affective functions did improve in some way or other—for example he could differentiate the 24 letters of the alphabet, he could utter the word *lait* (milk), he could write some words, etc.—Itard became less convinced of the uncivilized state of his pupil. Instead, just like Bonnaterre, he became suspicious about idiotism. Victor's character remained rough and unpredictable. He still went out in the rain and sat for hours at the side of the pool that was situated in the central court of the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb; he did not grasp the meaning of language; and after five more years did not utter one word correctly. Clearly regretting having ever started Victor's education and condemning the inhuman curiosity of men who had snatched him away from an innocent and happy life, Itard describes in detail a scene that is well worth quoting at length. It shows how the savage Other strongly resisted the civilization experiment:

As a rule towards the end of his dinner, even while he is anything but thirsty, he is seen to fill his glass with water, with the look of the glutton who uses his glass for an exquisite liquor, to gulp it down and swallow it drop by drop. But what adds to the interest of the scene is the place where it is set. It is near the window, upright, the eyes gazing at the countryside that the drinker has taken up position; as though, in the instant of his delight, this nature's child was searching to combine the two singlemost

45 Jean-Marie Degérando was connected to the Administrative Board of the National Institution for the Deaf in Paris and was also a member of the Société des Observateurs de l'homme. He was an influential politician and wrote some books on philosophical, anthropological and educational subjects such as the education of the deaf; J.-M. Degérando, *Considération sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages* (Paris: Société de l'observateur de l'homme, 1800).

46 J.-M. Itard, 'De l'éducation d'un homme sauvage ou des premiers développements physiques et moraux du jeune sauvage de l'Aveyron' (1801), in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 279–324.

47 For example Itard believed in the idea of Tabula Rasa. This meant that a man was born without innate ideas and had to develop them in intercourse with his environment.

48 J.-M. Itard, 'Rapport fait à son excellence le Ministre de l'Intérieur, sur les nouveaux développements et l'état actuel du sauvage de l'Aveyron' (1806), in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 401–45.

benefits that survived the loss of freedom: the drinking of some clear water and the sight of the sun and the countryside.<sup>49</sup>

After five years Itard became disinterested in the Wild Boy and left him with his governess Guérin, who continued to care for him until he died in 1828. Itard himself turned to the deaf and dumb. In 1828 he established a class to teach speech at the National Institution for the Deaf in Paris. Until then, all the deaf and dumb learned sign language. To teach the deaf to speak instead of signing, can be seen as a continuation of Victor's education. Strange and evocative gestures needed to be replaced by more controllable and manageable sounds. At the end of the nineteenth century (1880) Itard's fourth aim for Victor—to teach him speech—became commonplace in Western education for the deaf.<sup>50</sup>

### Antithesis: medical incurability

Right from the start of Itard's educational experiment Philippe Pinel (1746–1826) and Jean-Etienne Esquirol (1772–1840), two leading French psychiatrists, had contradicted Itard's view on Victor and his education. Pinel, who was a member of the Society of the Observers of Man, made his statement very clear on 29 November 1800.<sup>51</sup> The Wild Boy of Aveyron was nothing more than one of those children affected by idiotism who vegetated in the Parisian psychiatric institutions where Pinel was physician-in-chief: Bicêtre and Salpêtrière. The similarities between the Wild Boy and these children were striking for Pinel.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Victor's fruitless stay in the National Institution for the Deaf and Dumb demonstrated no signs of perfectibility or progress. Therefore he had to be an idiot and therefore incurable.

In his treatise on insanity published in 1801, Pinel split mental illness into five main categories: melancholia or delirium, mania without delirium, mania with delirium, dementia or the abolition of the thinking faculty, and idiotism or the obliteration of the intellectual faculties and affections.<sup>53</sup> The idiot differed from the demented person in not displaying any sign of intellect or affection. For Pinel, to be an idiot was to be 'incapable of feeling, attending to or gratifying without assistance the appetite for food, to remain motionless in the same place and position for several days, without discovering one single expression of thought or expression, to be at other times subject to sudden, furious and evanescent transport of passion'.<sup>54</sup> Through the works of Pinel the savage

49 [Presque toujours à la fin de son dîner, alors même qu'il n'est plus pressé par la soif, on le voit, avec l'air d'un gourmet qui apprête son verre pour une liqueur exquise, remplir le sien d'eau pure, la prendre par gorgées et l'avalier goutte à goutte. Mais ce qui ajoute beaucoup d'intérêt à cette scène, c'est le lieu où elle se passe. C'est près de la fenêtre, debout, les yeux tournés vers la campagne, que vient se placer notre buveur; comme si, dans ce moment de délectation, cet enfant de la nature cherchait à réunir les deux uniques biens qui aient survécu à la perte de sa liberté, la boisson d'une eau limpide et la vue du soleil et de la campagne.] J.-M. Itard, 'Rapport fait à son excellence le Ministre de l'Intérieur', 413.

50 In 1880 the second international congress on deaf education was held in Milan. At the end of the congress the participants reached a consensus about which method to use in the education of the deaf. All of the members, except three or four, voted in favour of the oral method. See for example: Ministère de l'instruction publique, *Compte rendu du congrès international pour l'amélioration du sort des sourds-muets tenu à Milan du 6 au 11 septembre 1880* (Rome: Imprimerie Heritiers Botta, 1881); H. Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 376–414.

51 Ph. Pinel, 'Rapport fait à la société des observateurs de l'homme sur l'enfant connu sous le nom de sauvage de l'Aveyron' (1800), in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 249–60 and 271–8. For more information on Pinel see: D.B. Weiner, *Comprendre et soigner. Philippe Pinel (1746–1826): la médecine de l'esprit* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

52 Ph. Pinel, 'Rapport fait à la société des observateurs de l'homme sur l'enfant connu sous le nom de sauvage de l'Aveyron' (1800), in *Victor de l'Aveyron*, by T. Gineste, 271–8.

53 Ph. Pinel, *Traité medico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale* (Paris, 1801).

54 Pinel, quoted in R.C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation*, 40.

temper of Victor in particular and disability in general became tamed on an epistemological level: they received a medical explanation. Idiotism became the result of an incomplete (Self-)structuring and the descriptive taxonomy of the botanists was replaced by a medical nosology.

Etienne Esquirol, physician-in-chief of the Maison Royale des aliénés de Charenton (Royal House of the Alienated) followed in the footsteps of his master Philippe Pinel in this matter but went an important step further. He introduced a new technique that would accompany the mentally disabled throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth century: classification.<sup>55</sup> For the first time mentally retarded people (*amentia*) were epistemologically differentiated from the mentally ill (*dementia*):

The demented human is deprived of the benefits he profited from before: it is a rich man ending up poor. The idiot has always been stuck in misfortune and misery. The human condition may differ. The idiot always remains alike. This one retains a lot of characteristics of childhood, the other retains the physiognomy of man the way he was created. The idiots are what they need to remain throughout their lives; everything about them reflects an imperfect or obstructed structure of his development. One cannot conceive any possibility of altering his state.<sup>56</sup>

In the same definition he raged against the intellectuals who argued that savages found in the woods were perfect men and almost superior to Newton and Bossuet. For Esquirol the Wild Boy of Aveyron was affected by idiocy and thus 'ineducable', as can be deduced from the definition given above.<sup>57</sup> Esquirol further differentiated two forms of idiocy and three forms of imbecility. Imbeciles were defined as generally well formed. Their physical disposition was nearly normal. They enjoyed the use of the intellectual and affective faculties but to a lesser extent than a perfect man. Scheerenberger has argued that idiots were painted by Esquirol in grimmer colours. According to Esquirol they reached the utmost limit of human degradation. Having no ideas, and no thinking powers, they had no desires and, therefore, had no need of signs or of speech.<sup>58</sup>

From this moment on what Foucault called *tableaux vivants* were constructed and modified.<sup>59</sup> This was an important step towards a productive state. The undifferentiated and chaotic mass of the population became divided into several categories, each connected to an industrial or economic function. Foucault used the rise of tactical warfare to make his point clear.<sup>60</sup> In the past, he argued, the power of the army depended on the number of soldiers. But the invention of the rifle and the cost of instructing the soldiers made the life of a warrior more valuable. Besides being powerful and strong, a soldier also had to be flexible and precise. Both on the battlefield and alongside it, this evolution required a greater transparency and visibility. There are some similarities between Foucault's arguments regarding the introduction of the rifle and the introduction of subtypes by Pinel and

55 P. Perron, 'L'évolution des idées à propos des déficiences mentales', *Les sciences de l'éducation*, 4 (1989), 7–28.

56 [l'homme en démence est privé des biens dont il jouissait autrefois: c'est un riche devenu pauvre. L'idiot a toujours été dans l'infortune et la misère. L'état de l'homme peut varier; celui de l'idiot est toujours le même. Celui-ci a beaucoup des traits de l'enfance, celui-là conserve de la physionomie de l'homme fait.... Les idiots sont ce qu'ils doivent être pendant tout le cours de leurs vie; tout décèle en eux d'une organisation imparfaite ou arrêtée dans son développement. On se conçoit pas la possibilité de changer cet état.] E. Esquirol, 'Idiotie' (1818), in *Recueil de mémoires, notes et observations sur l'idiotie*, by D.M. Bourneville, 20–3.

57 E. Esquirol, 'Idiotie' (1818), in *Recueil de mémoires, notes et observations sur l'idiotie*, by D.M. Bourneville, 20.

58 R.C. Scheerenberger, *A History of Mental Retardation*, 54.

59 M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*.

60 M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*.

Esquirol. Just as with the case of the rifle, those who introduced subtypes also urged for greater observability of patients and this resulted in the nosological deconstruction of the mentally retarded. They became sick instead of savage, and had to be classified just like soldiers in order to increase productivity. One of the reasons why Esquirol differentiated between the mentally ill and mentally retarded was precisely because the latter obstructed the work done by the patients.

Not all physicians, however, thought idiots were unfit for education. The first practical attempts to educate imbeciles and idiots in the first half of the nineteenth century were made by Falret and Ferrus. In 1828 Guillaume Ferrus (1784–1861) started a special class for idiots and epileptics in Bicêtre.<sup>61</sup> Each morning they were guided to this space and submitted to order and discipline. They learned to obey, to work and sometimes even to read and write.<sup>62</sup> The aim was to destroy their isolation and to reconnect them to society. In 1831 Ferrus's example would be followed by Jean-Pierre Falret (1794–1870) in the psychiatric institution dedicated to women: Salpêtrière. From this point onwards 80 idiots, imbeciles and persons suffering from chronic psychiatric disease were educated during the day.

In 1842 the board of Bicêtre sought an instructor for the educational section for idiots and imbeciles. Their eye fell on Edouard Séguin (1812–80).<sup>63</sup> Séguin already had some experience in educating idiotic children. In 1837 Guersant, the physician connected to Bicêtre, asked Itard to educate a young idiotic boy. Itard, now old and sick, refused but proposed an assistant at the National Institute for Deaf and Dumb in Paris: Edouard Séguin. Together with Esquirol, Séguin reported on this educational attempt in a 14-page pamphlet.<sup>64</sup> In 1840, Séguin had also established a class for between 10 and 12 idiots in the rue Faubourg Saint-Martin near Paris. Probably these experiences contributed to his appointment at Bicêtre.<sup>65</sup>

However, this appointment would not last long. In 1843 Séguin resigned.<sup>66</sup> Seven years later he emigrated to the United States, where he contributed significantly to the development of care for idiots and imbeciles.<sup>67</sup> In his history of Bicêtre, Bru has been rather vague about the reasons for Séguin's resignation. However, some contemporary reactions to his work provide clues to his departure. First, his lack of medical knowledge was a thorn in the flesh of physicians such as Moreau de Tours, Félix Voisin and Belhomme.<sup>68</sup> Idiocy was for them the exclusive preserve of medicine and they did not approve of a teacher writing books about it. Second, Séguin did not adhere to the phrenological theory adopted by many of the Parisian psychiatrists.

61 See J. Gateaux-Mennecier and J. Mises, *Bourneville et l'enfance aliénée*; P. Bru, *Histoire de Bicêtre (Hospice–Prison–Asile) d'après les documents historiques* (Paris: Au bureau du progrès, 1890).

62 F. Voisin, 'De l'idiotie chez les enfants et des autres particularités d'intelligence ou de caractère qui nécessitent pour eux une instruction et une éducation spéciales de leur responsabilités', in D.-M. Bourneville (1891), *Recueil de mémoire*, 268–9.

63 Y. Pélicier and G. Thuillier, *Edouard Séguin (1812–1880) 'Instituteur des idiots'* (Paris: Economica, 1980); Y. Pélicier and G. Thuillier, 'Le fondateur de l'éducation des idiots: Edouard Séguin (1812–1880)', *Paedagogica Historica*, 20 (1980), 129–52; M.E. Talbot, *Edouard Seguin: A Study of an Educational Approach to the Treatment of Mentally Defective Children* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1964).

64 Y. Séguin, *Traitement moral, hygiène et éducation des idiots et des autres enfants arriérés ou retardés dans leur développement, agités de mouvements involontaires, débiles, muets non-sourds, bègues, etc.* (Paris: Baillière, 1846), 1–22.

65 E. Séguin, *Hygiène et éducation des idiots* (Paris: Baillière, 1843).

66 P. Bru, *Histoire de Bicêtre (Hospice–Prison–Asile)*, 274.

67 J.W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind. A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

68 J. Gateaux-Mennecier and J. Mises, *Bourneville et l'enfance aliénée*, 32.



It was this phrenological theory—propagated by Jacques Etienne Belhomme (1800–80), Félix Voisin (1794–1872) and Louis Delasiauve (1804–93)—that suggested the possibility of educating idiots and imbeciles. These three doctors were all second-generation phrenologists. This is evident from their roles, writings and initiatives. In 1839, for example Jacques-Etienne Belhomme became secretary of the phrenological organization in Paris.<sup>69</sup> Voisin was also member of the phrenological movement. From 1839 to 1840 he was president of the Société phrénologique de Paris (Phrenological Society of Paris) and in 1844 Delasiauve published a booklet, *Research into Diverse Forms of Criticism on Phrenology*. In this pamphlet he defended phrenology against the reproaches of impiety, charlatanism and lack of a scientific basis.

This phrenological theory would combine and extend the existing strategies of classification, observation and registration through the construction of scientifically structured norms, the accentuation of the idiot's life, and a stress on the danger the mentally retarded provoked for the population.

### Synthesis: phrenological educability

Phrenology was constructed on the basis of insights provided by Franz-Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and his short-time co-worker, Johann-Caspar Spurzheim (1776–1832).<sup>70</sup> First of all, phrenologists saw the brain as the sum of different organs. These corresponded with independent intellectual, moral or affective faculties. Second, phrenologists believed that the form, size and length of the skull represented its encephalic development. One branch of phrenology, craniology, argued that the results of a geometric investigation of the skull could predict the person's moral character. Craniology was widely applied in the domain of criminal justice and psychological research.

In an excellent study, Lanteri-Laura shows that the first half of the nineteenth century was the heyday of the phrenological movement in Paris.<sup>71</sup> In 1807, after giving lectures at German universities and courts, Gall settled in the French capital and in 1819 became a French citizen.<sup>72</sup> Phrenology was popular in the French capital and Gall's lectures were attended by hundreds of people. Many Parisian psychiatrists continually measured and weighed their inmate's skulls. From 1831 until 1848 there even existed a phrenological association called the Phrenological Society, which published a journal devoted to the discussion of phrenological themes: *Journal de la Société Phrénologique de Paris (Journal of the Phrenological Society of Paris)*.

That phrenology was able to break down the wall of incurability, as we shall see, provides us with an apparent paradox. How can a theory, on the one hand, deny the role of environmental influences and, on the other, promote special education? Belhomme for example was very clear about the role of education.<sup>73</sup> He reproached Itard for his belief in the omnipotence of education: 'Just do not believe in massive successes, one need not search to impose on impressionable spirits who would believe that an idiot might be

69 J. Goldstein, *Console and Classify. The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century with a New Afterword* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 256.

70 Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science. Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); G. Lanteri-Laura, *Histoire de la phrénologie: l'homme et son cerveau selon F.J. Gall* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970); M. Renneville, *Le langage des crânes. Une histoire de la phrénologie* (Paris: Sanofi-Synthélabo, 2000).

71 G. Lanteri-Laura, *Histoire de la phrénologie*, 145–62.

72 Ibid., 125.

73 J. Arveiller, 'Musée pédagogique: entre incurabilité théorique et éducatibilité pratique. La thèse de Jacques-Etienne Belhomme' (1824), *Les sciences de l'éducation*, 34 (2001), 85–106.



changed to the extent that he might become a normal person.<sup>74</sup> Education could not create a normal person, nor could it create faculties. It was better to think of education as a tool to improve a situation, to strengthen a person's existing strategies. So even if education could not create new faculties it could stimulate positive developments. The presupposition of independent and autonomous faculties in the human mind—even if they were innate—meant a way out of the thesis regarding incurability that underpinned the work of Pinel and Esquirol. This phrenological conviction led Belhomme to argue for the educability of idiots and imbeciles: 'I understand by educability the likelihood, appearing upon the birth of a human being, of the capability of education. This capability is in itself innate. If the intelligence is less developed than it ought to be in relation to age and sex, this capability will also be smaller by comparison.'<sup>75</sup> This paradoxical change from medical incurability to phrenological educability partly resulted from the degrees of idiocy that Belhomme had observed and described in his treatise. He differentiated between five subtypes of imbecility and idiocy ranging from a vegetational body to the slightest feeble-mindedness allowing individuals to render some forms of service to society.<sup>76</sup> Instead of taking the ability to speak as the decisive criterion like Esquirol, Belhomme founded his classification on the basis of the activity of the imbecile and the idiot.

The classification of Belhomme symbolizes a key change. Instead of the ability to speak, the activity of the body became the criterion for differentiation. Not words but life became the central focus of the political searchlight. One could say this in an industrialized society characterized by increasing demography, growing urbanization and ever more importance attached to the strength of the body instead of dialectic power. In addition to the accent on the body, Belhomme's definition also introduced the comparison of the idiot with the standard of the fully developed adult and with the development of normal children of the same age. Now it became possible to speak in terms of retardation instead of monstrosity or insanity and to think in terms of strengthening and fortifying the human body. However, although Belhomme paved the way for the educability of idiots and imbeciles on a theoretical level, he never educated idiots himself.

In 1843 Belhomme republished his essay on idiocy to counter the impression created by Félix Voisin that the latter was the first to believe in the educability of idiots and imbeciles. In contrast with Belhomme, Voisin tried to promulgate the idea of educability by publishing books and founding pedagogical institutions. In 1843—the year that Belhomme and Séguin published their volumes on idiocy and its treatment—Voisin republished some of his previous publications in a book entitled *De l'idiotie chez les enfants et des autres particularités d'intelligence ou de caractère qui nécessitent pour eux une instruction et une éducation spéciales de leur responsabilités* (*On idiocy among children*).<sup>77</sup> Twenty years earlier, in cooperation with his lifelong friend Falret, he had founded a so-called Maison de la santé (House of Health). More important, however, was the foundation by Voisin of an institution called Etablissement orthophrénique

74 [Car ne croyez pas aux succès immenses, il ne faut pas chercher à éblouir les esprit crédules qui pourraient croire qu'un idiot peut-être tellement modifié qu'il puisse devenir homme normal.] J.-E. Belhomme, 'Essai sur l'idiotie' (1824), in D.M. Bourneville (1891), *Recueil de mémoires*, 55.

75 [J'appelle éducation l'aptitude qu'apporte en naissant l'homme, à recevoir de l'éducation. Cette aptitude est elle même précoce. Si l'intelligence est moins développée qu'elle ne doit l'être relativement à l'âge, au sexe, etc., cette aptitude est aussi moins grande.] J.-E. Belhomme, 'Essai sur l'idiotie' (1824), in D.M. Bourneville (1891), *Recueil de mémoires*, 62.

76 J.-E. Belhomme, 'Essai sur l'idiotie' (1824), in D.M. Bourneville (1891), *Recueil de mémoires*, 43–93 [52–4.]

77 F. Voisin, *De l'idiotie chez les enfants et des autres particularités d'intelligence ou de caractère qui nécessitent pour eux une instruction et une éducation spéciales de leur responsabilités* (Paris: Librairie de l'Académie Royale de Médecine, 1843).

(Orthophrenic institution). This was erected in 1834 and probably grew out of the experiences Voisin had at Bicêtre where he was responsible for the educational section for idiots until his retirement in 1861.<sup>78</sup>

First of all, Voisin's writings and practical initiatives reflected the ongoing classification and differentiation of idiots and imbeciles. In his Orthophrenic institution, Voisin states that he differentiated between four classes of children who needed orthophrenological treatment. The first group consisted of children who had disabled cerebral organization. The second group consisted of children who had the same faculties as normal children but whose education influenced them in a negative manner. Children with extraordinary intellectual abilities formed the third class. The fourth class consisted of those children who were born to mentally ill parents and were predestined to be mentally ill.<sup>79</sup> Obviously, Voisin did not restrict his phrenological programme to idiots and imbeciles. As a result, he can be seen as the forerunner of the term 'abnormal children' that emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> With regard to the first group, Voisin further differentiated them into four subtypes: 'complete idiots, less complete idiots, partial idiots and feeble-minded persons'.<sup>81</sup> The last two subtypes were not educable for they possessed almost no intellectual, affective or moral faculties.

Second, Voisin's writings demonstrate the importance of a scientifically structured norm, a norm provided by meticulous measurement.<sup>82</sup> In one of his books he noted: 'from the lowest-ranking idiot on the scale up to the ordinary human, there is a host of intermediary degrees'.<sup>83</sup> The normal became related to the abnormal. The unjustifiable difference between normal men and raging furies was substituted for a measurable and calculable link. The idiots only differed from the normal in that they did not possess some of the intellectual, sensitive or affective faculties. Semelaigne even ascribed to Voisin the opinion that every man is more or less idiotic. Nobody, according to Voisin, possessed a harmonious cerebrum.<sup>84</sup> This sounded quite ominous. The potential danger of the Other had to be averted by education aimed at destroying the dangerous character.

Third, Voisin emphasized the importance of good observation as the basis for education. Voisin stated that before one could start the education of an imbecile one should be in possession of an adequate and detailed description of the manners and capacities of the child. Therefore, Voisin developed a questionnaire consisting of 136 questions divided into seven categories.<sup>85</sup> He did not restrict the questions to the moral, intellectual, physical and sensory condition of the child. In addition Voisin examined the child's past, the pregnancy of the mother and the character of the father. To complete the data, Voisin thought it necessary to report on the most important features of the child's skull. In this way, the subjective gaze that pinned down the Wild Boy of Aveyron was transformed

78 For some biographical information on Voisin see R. Semelaigne, *Les grands alienists français* (Paris: G. Steinheil, 1894).

79 C. Marc, 'Rapport fait à M. le conseiller d'état, préfet de police, sur l'établissement orthophrénique de M. Félix Voisin, docteur en Médecine' (1834), in D.M. Bourneville, *Recueil de mémoires*, 281–4.

80 It would be interesting to investigate why at the end of the nineteenth century all these carefully differentiated subtypes suddenly became gathered again.

81 [Idiots complets, idiots moins complets, idiots partielles and imbeciles.] F. Voisin, *De l'idiotie chez les enfants*.

82 See also the full title of Voisin's book of 1830: F. Voisin, 'Applications de la physiologie du cerveau à l'étude des enfants qui nécessitent une éducation spéciale', in F. Voisin, *De l'idiotie chez les enfants*.

83 [Depuis l'idiot le plus bas dans l'échelle jusqu'à l'homme ordinaire, il y a une foule de degré intermédiaire.] F. Voisin, *De l'idiotie chez les enfants*, 94.

84 R. Semelaigne, *Les grands aliénistes français*.

85 F. Voisin, 'Analyse psychologique de l'entendement humain chez les idiots', in *Recueil de mémoires, notes et observations*, by D.M. Bourneville, 275–80.

into a scientific observation. Observation and registration—reserved for the medical profession—formed the basis of the diagnosis and the starting point for individualized education. In 1826 Voisin underlined the importance of a differentiated educational approach: ‘Do not ever submit all your pupils to the uniformity of a single level; study their primitive dispositions: exalted, moderate, likely to adapt to the situation, the faculties of each and every one of them.’<sup>86</sup> However, he did not elaborate these ideas into a concrete curriculum.

Louis Delasiauve was the only phrenologist who provided views concerning the practice of a phrenologically orientated education. He was convinced—just like Belhomme and Voisin—of the need for individualized education: ‘Education imposes just this single rule: one needs to try and delve into every subject ... it should take all particulars into account’.<sup>87</sup> In 1859, Delasiauve wrote a book entitled *Des principes qui doivent présider l’éducation des idiots* (*On the principles that should govern the education of idiots*) based on his educational experiences with idiots and imbeciles in Bicêtre and Salpêtrière. In this book, Delasiauve distinguished four foci in the education of idiots. First the idiot had to become clean. The child had to learn how to wash, how to dress, how to go to the bathroom, how to use a knife and fork etc. Second, Delasiauve found it important that the body of the idiot was strengthened. So besides cleanliness gymnastics was also part of the curriculum. The body had to become flexible, vital and healthy. It was quite common to see idiots scaling and descending ladders, throwing balls to each other and handling a hoop. Third, like many other psychiatrists of his time, Delasiauve stressed the importance of labour. This educational tool not only increased the economic contribution of the idiot but also stimulated a more docile character. Finally, in one or two paragraphs Delasiauve pointed out that an intellectual education was only intended for a very limited group and should not be undertaken too early. ‘It is all about a transformation, which often, rather than an isolated being, can give back to society a bearable member, even a useful servant.’<sup>88</sup>

### Conclusion

In the course of the first half of the nineteenth century the ‘savage Other’ became linked to the ‘normal’. Itard first tried to identify the disabled—in the person of the Wild Boy of Aveyron. He saw Victor as having the potential for normality and believed in the possibility of complete normalization for the Wild Boy in particular, and for the sensorially handicapped in general. The failure of this educational experiment confirmed the diagnosis of Pinel and Esquirol: the savage of Aveyron was an idiot and incurable (because to them idiocy was incurable). So, second, an unstable bridge was built between the normal and pathological. Although illness cannot be defined on an epistemological level without referring to the pathological, it can stand at the other side of the bridge—at a more or less safe distance. Third, phrenology constructed a more stable bridge between the deviation

86 [Ne soumettez point indistinctement tous vos élèves à l’uniformité du même plan; étudiez leurs dispositions primitives; exaltes, modérés, suivant l’occurrence, les facultés de chacun d’eux.] Voisin quoted in W. Hellinckx, ‘De polemiek tussen de orthophrenoloog Félix Voisin en de dichter Népomucène Lemerrier’, in R. De Groot (ed.), *Markante momenten* (Utrecht: Agiel, 2003), 52.

87 [L’éducation n’a qu’un règle. Il faut approfondir chaque sujet.... Elle devrait tenir compte des particularités.] L. Delasiauve, *Des principes qui doivent présider l’éducation des idiots* (Paris: librairie de Victor masson), 6–8.

88 [Il s’agit d’une transformation qui souvent, au lieu d’un être abject, peut rendre à la société un membre supportable et parfois même un utile serviteur.] L. Delasiauve, *Des principes qui doivent présider l’éducation des idiots*, 7.

and the norm. Now one could easily be reached by the other side. A continuum was constructed ranging from more to less idiotic and from more to less imbecilic. It was this continuum, and the fear it implied, that induced some of the leading phrenologists to formulate their belief in the educability and perfectibility of the idiot. The Other resembled and could be brought to the normal. In short he/she was ‘tamed’—at least on an epistemological level.

So, the history of French special education may indeed be read as an emergence of biopower. The development of care for the mentally retarded in France coincided with an overwhelming attention to registration. The help of reports, statistics, phrenological tables and questionnaires was sought to pin down the life of an idiot and so to make it more ‘true’. The life of an idiotic or imbecilic individual became increasingly important. This represents what was happening on a larger scale. Words such as ‘individuality’, ‘efficiency’, ‘normality’ and so on became central notions in Western society. Also the life of idiots had to be made *brauchbar* (useful). In addition, the ability to live and to be productive formed the basis on which to classify idiots and imbeciles into an infinite number of subtypes. Last but not least, there was the belief that an improvement in an idiot’s life could contribute to an improvement in the life of a population. Thus disability can be represented as a historical crystallization of biopower—‘the power to make life and to let die’<sup>89</sup>—and as an object of an unidentified ‘tamer’.

89 [Un pouvoir de faire vivre et de laisser mourir.] M. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, 214.